

New Exhibit Captures Art of Rug Hooking

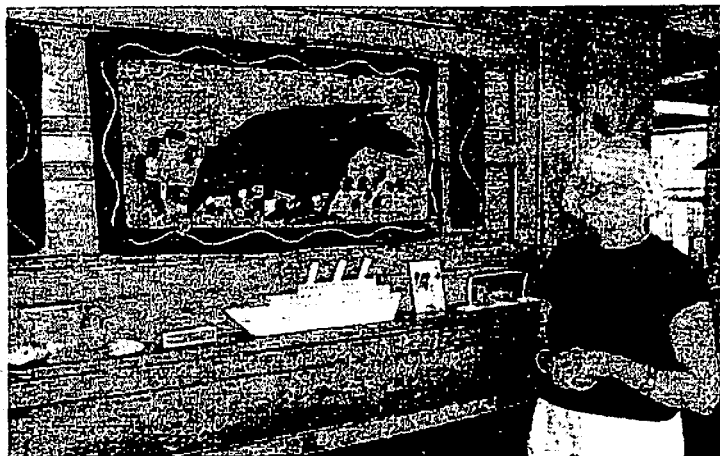
By KEITH L. MARTIN

Olga Rothschild doesn't mind if you walk all over her art; in fact, she prefers it.

From the studio of her home on Standish Street, Rothschild is surrounded by numerous bins pouring over with scraps of wool of various sizes that will be pulled, spun and arranged through a linen canvas to create not only a working rug, but a work of art.

She is one of the thousands of artisans worldwide using these and other materials to hook rugs into a myriad of pictures, landscapes and designs and one of five artists currently displaying her creations at a new exhibit at the Art Complex Museum.

Underfoot: Contemporary Hooked Rugs runs at the museum until November 7 and features rug makers with unique styles, from the sheep and farm dominated themes of Patty Yoder to the feminist messages of Linda Rae Coughlin. Rothschild is the only Duxbury artist featured, yet had a big role in getting the museum to consider featuring the rugs as true pieces of art.



In addition to featuring her own work, Rothschild's home includes other rug hookers' works, including this rug of a crow and additional side panels by Kingston-based artist Laurie Sybertz.



Local artist Olga Rothschild hooks a rug featuring an American flag, the latest in her stable of works; some are currently on exhibit at the Art Complex Museum.

Four years ago, she submitted one of her rugs for a juried show at the museum. Senior curator Catherine Mays took an interest in the work and wanted to know more about the process of rug hooking so she went straight to the artist. Rothschild took Mays to several area rug shows and introduced her to the 20-member strong Duxbury Rug Hookers, who meet regularly at the Alden Barn to work and share new creations.

"I think she realized that this could be a creative medium and an artistic one," said Rothschild, who's lived in Duxbury for 10 years. "It is a craft, in terms of a craft being something you learn and do, but you can make art of a craft with your intention and creative ability."

For Mays, the experience of learning more about rug hooking turned into admiration for these artists carrying on a tradition that peaked in the 1850s when old hooked bed covers were thrown to the floor to be walked over.

"I began to develop an extraordinary appreciation for rug hooking," she said. "The craft is phenomenal and so is the dedication. At the heart is an intense love for the domestic art and they have taken it to an incredible level."

From the sense of color and design to the various themes shown through the five artists the museum has chosen to exhibit, Mays said that these are truly pieces of art that have never been shown at their location or many other galleries in the region.

Rug hooking will be center stage in Duxbury for quite some time, however, as not only will the Art Complex Museum host their exhibit and two workshops to meet a pair of the artists, but the Duxbury Free Library's Helen Bumpus Gallery will also display the works of rug hookers begin-

ning on September 9. *Rugged Pleasures* features the work of the Duxbury Rug Hookers, whose creations will also make the transition from floor to wall art.

There is also the solo work of Duxbury's Jeanne Quinzani on display at Artica on Depot Street and a national exhibit coming to the Cahoon Museum in Cotuit displaying 55 hooked creations, including one by Rothschild, that have been turned into a deck of cards to get more word out about the art form of rug hooking.

"I think there is a preconceived notion about rug hooking that dates back to the beginning of the century," she said. "There is such an increase in interest locally in rug hooking and what it is and that truly makes me happy."

Rothschild has been hooking rugs for 20 years in the traditional form of using wool rather than yarn to guide

through a piece of linen on which she first carefully draws out her design. Her studio is an homage to the art form, with every imaginable book on the craft, a large string with colored squares indicating the hues created from chemical and natural dyes for her to work from and the artist's own works, cataloged in scrapbooks by year that show the progression from idea to art.

With geometry and strips of colors a theme largely dominating her work, Rothschild said that when she discovered rug hooking, it quickly became an attractive way to continue the bloodlines of art in her family, including her father who was a painter and printmaker.

"This became my way of expression," she said. "I could make art from this craft and my teacher gave me the confidence to do so. It satisfied those artistic urges and when I was finished, I also had a rug."

Rothschild's home features many of her works and the creations of other rug hookers, but you won't find many on the walls; rather they are on the floor where they are truly meant to be displayed.

"An artist could hang all of his paintings or drawings on the wall, but it would be too much," she said. "With this, you can put them all over the house used as rugs."

From room to room, Rothschild points down to show another piece of hers or a collected piece, some covered by years of footsteps and dirt, but nothing that bothers the artist.

"I take no offense when someone steps on my rugs," said Rothschild. "I like them to be walked on."

The *Underfoot: Contemporary Hooked Rugs* exhibit runs from August 29 to November 7 at the Art Complex Museum. Museum hours are 1-4 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday and admission is free. For more information, call 781-934-6634.